

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release January 4, 1974

Carroll 202/343-5634

GREEN AND LOGGERHEAD TURTLES PROPOSED FOR FOREIGN ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST

The Department of the Interior announced today it is proposing to add loggerhead and green turtles, two species increasingly victimized by man and his activities, to its list of foreign endangered fish and wildlife.

A listing as "endangered" would prohibit the importation of these turtles and their products into the United States for commercial purposes.

Although it is difficult to determine the worldwide population of loggerhead and green turtles since these species exist in many of the world's more remote islands, strong evidence exists that serious declines in their numbers are occurring in many places.

Green turtles are found worldwide in tropical seas and occasionally stray into more temperate waters. Most recorded nesting is along the Mexican coast. In the United States, they occur in Florida waters.

Stocks in the Caribbean, once believed to have numbered at least 50 million, now are estimated at less than 10,000. Reproductive potential may be destroyed in the near future if present harvest levels are maintained.

Of all marine turtles, the green turtle is the most valuable to man. Its flesh and eggs have been eaten for centuries and the cartilage is used in soup. In recent years, the oil and skin have found increasing favor in the cosmetic and leather industries.

(over)

The major nesting areas for loggerhead turtles are along the east coast of the United States from North Carolina to Florida and to a lesser extent on scattered islands off the Gulf States. Populations here are estimated between 25,000 and 50,000.

Loggerheads are protected in the United States from those who would take them for meat, but the eggs and meat of this species are found in many markets in Central America. With few exceptions, turtle nests are unprotected in the Caribbean.

Some poaching still occurs in the United States, and loggerheads are subjected to several inadvertent perils, not the least of which are incompatible oceanfront developments. Large numbers probably are drowned by shrimp trawlers off the Atlantic and Gulf States. Smaller numbers also are killed for "sport" by skin divers or when struck by boats in estuarine regions. Some are lost to predators such as sharks, sand crabs, raccoons, and gulls.

Interior's proposal, developed by the Fish and Wildlife Service, was published in the Federal Register on December 28 and allows the public 60 days to comment before a final decision is reached.

X X X